**The Last Lecture Discussion Questions**

1. When someone asked what he wanted on his tombstone, Pausch said: “Randy Pausch: He Lived Thirty Years After a Terminal Diagnosis.’” [Page 247] If you were to write his epitaph, what would it say?

2. Summing up a theme of his lecture and book, Pausch writes: “We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand.” [Page 32] This is one of many clichés he admits he loves and uses liberally in The Last Lecture. Did he succeed in making any old ideas fresh? How did he do it?

3. Pausch began his lecture “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams” by saying he wasn’t going to deal with big questions of religion or spirituality, and he sticks to that pattern in The Last Lecture. How does the book benefit or suffer from his decision?

4. Pausch could have called his book The Last Lectures, because he structures it as a series of mini-lectures instead of one long lecture. How well does this technique work?

5. The Last Lecture balances general advice such as “dream big” with specific tips – for example, about how to work well in small groups. “Instead of saying, ‘I think we should do A, instead of B,’ try ‘What if we did A, instead of B?’” [Page 190] Which, if any, of the tips struck you as most helpful?

6. Many cancer patients are bombarded with the advice to “be optimistic” or “think positively.” This approach has led to a medical backlash alluded to in the chapter “A Way to Understand Optimism.” Pausch says his surgeon worries about “patients who are inappropriately optimistic or ill-informed”: “It pains him to see patients who are having a tough day healthwise and assume it’s because they weren’t positive enough.” [Page 249] What is Pausch’s view of this? Is he appropriately or inappropriately optimistic? Why?

7. Many people who have heard about The Last Lecture may be tempted to give the book to someone who has had a devastating diagnosis, or who is perhaps dying, hoping it will provide comfort or cheer. What would you say to them? Is this a book for the living or the dying?

8. Randy said he realized many of his dreams because he had terrific parents. What details from his childhood do you think led to the successes he had in later life? Are there lessons in Randy’s story for people who didn’t win the “parent lottery?”

9. Randy makes the distinction between “people” and “things.” What did you think of his decision to empty that can of soda in the backseat of his car?

10. Randy realized that he didn’t give the lecture because he wanted to. He gave it because he “had to.” Are there things inside of you that “need to come out?” What are some ways that people express those things?

11. Is there a quote, scene, or lesson that struck you as particularly meaningful? Explain.

12. If you were going to give your own “last lecture,” what would you say?